

Harding River, near Roebourne: 2 on pool along river on November 1, 1959.

In the South-West, the species is known to breed on the fresh water swamps and lakes at Gundaring, Moora, Dowerin, Carnamah and Naraling, and only visits the coastal plain near Perth during the summer and autumn months when many of the inland expanses of water have evaporated.

—JULIAN FORD, Attadale.

Feeding of Young Passerine Birds by Nest-mate.—Owing to an accident on September 30, 1961, in which the nest of a Welcome Swallow (*Hirundo neoxena*) fell from beneath a Swan River jetty, I became foster parent to three recently-hatched swallow chicks. These were reared successfully on a diet of houseflies, mincemeat and meat meal.

The three chicks fledged on October 21, 1961, at 25-26 days of age, but continued to beg for food. On several such occasions, subsequent to the immediate food requirements being fulfilled, I observed one chick—never a particular individual—feed one or other of its nest-mates. It would beg for and receive a fly from me in the usual manner, but instead of swallowing the food, simply close its bill over it, all the while emitting a peculiar whining throaty chirp and looking abstractedly about as though searching for something. After a few seconds of so doing it would then proceed to thrust the fly against the body of the nearest begging nest-mate, which, on feeling the movement, would increase its activity. All begging was orientated toward me. However, the vigorous calling of the unfed birds seemed to stimulate activity on the part of the one still holding the fly, and after a few further thrusts the gaping bill would be located and the fly transferred in typical parent-chick feeding attitude. The two birds would then settle quietly.

I have sometimes observed this same behaviour in several of my hand-reared nestling and recently-fledged Zebra Finches (*Taeniopygia castanotis*). In this case the first-satisfied bird would cease to beg, but respond to the continued begging of its nest-mates by actually going through the process of regurgitating seed, producing a number which were held at the tip of the bill.

Inexperienced downward thrusts would then be made at the forward parts of the begging chicks. In almost all cases a gape would eventually be found, in this instance usually helped by the calling chick turning toward the bird with the seed, and an attitude fully suggestive of parent-chick feeding relation adopted.

I could not ascertain how much of one bird's feed was so shared, but certainly a few seeds were transferred.

If this behaviour is truly representative of what happens in the wild, it could have a marked effect on the survival rate in a brood of young birds, should one in particular receive an over-abundance of food from its parents compared with other nest-mates. It may be considered as biologically advantageous behaviour, a kind of built-in compensatory mechanism to equalise food distribution.

—C. A. NICHOLLS, Nedlands.